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Operation Dirty Harry Yields Large Mortar Round

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MUQDADIYAH, Iraq (February 20, 2006) – Continuous efforts to thwart Anti-Iraqi Forces and discover their weapons caches is key to the stability and protection of the citizens of Iraq. Ensuring efforts are constantly working and helping Iraq to progress forward to the future are U.S. Soldiers, U.S. Airmen and their military working dogs, as well as their Iraqi brothers-in-arms, the Iraqi army.

Recently, during a joint operation - Operation “Dirty Harry” - Company C, 1-68 Combined Arms Battalion, 3rd Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, Task Force Band of Brothers, the 35th Security Forces Squadron Air Force dog handlers and Soldiers with the Iraqi army came together to section off and search a neighborhood and surrounding farmland in the Diyala Province, south of Muqdadiya.

Not understanding the joint military visit’s objective, which was planned and led by the Iraqi army, local children smiled and waved as each force dismounted their vehicles and tactically moved in to and through the neighborhood.

As Iraqi Soldiers approached the homes and explained the intent of their search to the residents, U.S. forces pulled security on the streets outside. After the Iraqi army departed each home the Air Force dog teams were called in to do a last “once over” to ensure there was no explosive residue present.

When the last home was thoroughly searched yielding no contra-band, the joint forces assembled on line to sweep through an area of farmland behind the neighborhood.

Using all tools available to them they dug and turned over debris looking for hidden munitions. In addition to the military working dogs, mine detectors were also used.

Not long into the search, a mine detector's alarm rang out, catching Spc. Peter Mendiola's attention. Mendiola, a member of Company C, 1-68 CAB, was searching near Sgt. Steven Gonzales, also with Company C, who was using the mine detector that sounded off.

"He said he had a metal of some sort," Mendiola explained. "I dug it up and it happened to be a pretty big mortar round."

Even though it was the U.S. Army who located the mortar round, the IA were the leaders of the overall mission.

"We just pulled security for them," said Sgt. Muriel Orlando Droke, another member of Company C, 1-68 CAB. "They don't have a problem taking charge and moving in the front. I think the IA is performing very well."

Editor's note: Staff Sgt. Sheryl L. Lawry contributed to this article.



Sgt. Steven Gonzales, Combat Engineer with E Co. 1-68 Combined Arms Battalion unearths a 155mm round buried in a field in south Muqdadiyah, Iraq.



An Iraqi Army soldier checks the roof of a house for any contra-band, during Operation Dirty Harry in south Muqdadiyah, Iraq.